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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Fiftieth session
Item 12 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN FIELDS WITH WHICH THE SUB-COMMISSION HAS BEEN OR MAY BE CONCERNED

Note verbale dated 9 June 1998 from the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the secretariat of the Sub-Commission

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliments to the secretariat of the fiftieth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and has the honour to submit a note entitled "The Role of the British Government in the Use of Depleted Uranium against the Iraqi People during the Gulf War".*

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq would be grateful if the aforementioned document could be circulated as an official document of the fiftieth session of the Sub-Commission under agenda item 12.

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* The attachment to the note submitted by the Government of Iraq is reproduced as received.

The role of the British Government in the use of depleted uranium against the Iraqi people

The Government of the Republic of Iraq wishes to draw the attention of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to the new additional admission by the British Foreign Office on 30 April 1998 that the British forces participating in the coalition that attacked Iraq in 1991 used depleted uranium in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the international treaties and conventions prohibiting the use of weapons with excessively injurious or indiscriminate effects. In his reply to an inquiry by the Human Relief Foundation, Mr. A.N. King, an official in the Middle East Department of the British Foreign Office, indicated that British tanks fired depleted uranium rounds during the Gulf War on orders from the British Ministry of Defence (a copy of Mr. A.N. King's reply is attached hereto). This new admission confirms the earlier admissions by numerous official and unofficial British and American bodies to the effect that the coalition forces led by the United States of America committed crimes of genocide, for which they are accountable under international law.

David Rifkind, the former British Minister of Defence, had already admitted, in a letter dated 6 December 1994 and addressed to Sir Malcolm Steel, a British Member of Parliament, that British forces had fired 88 depleted uranium rounds during the attack of Iraq and that the United States forces had fired a far larger number. His letter also indicated that depleted uranium rounds emit highly toxic and health-threatening substances when they impact on a hard surface. Scientific studies and research have categorically proved that the United States of America and Britain used depleted uranium in their military operations against Iraq and thereby subjected large areas of Iraqi territory to lethal radioactive contamination. A considerable number of previously unfamiliar pathological conditions have been reported, such as congenital deformities, osseous abnormalities and unexplained cases of falling hair and strange skin diseases with which individuals have been afflicted in the areas affected by the bombardment. There has also been an increase in the incidence of leukaemia among children.

While raising this matter, Iraq reaffirms its legal right to claim equitable compensation in respect of the severe damage that the use of these weapons has caused to the people, facilities and environment of Iraq.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH
Tel: 0171 270 3100

Our reference: No. 284/001/98
30 April 1998
Human Relief Foundation
PO Box 194
BRADFORD
BD7 1YN

Dear Sir/Madam,

We received a number of postcards (copy enclosed) from members of the general public in support of your campaign on Iraq. We have responded to all those who wrote.

You should know that we replied along the following lines (although not all correspondents have received this fuller version).

Firstly, you asked "what role did the British Government play in the use of depleted uranium against the Iraqi people?".

Depleted uranium (DU) tank ammunition was used by both United Kingdom and United States troops during the Gulf War. DU-based tank ammunition was brought into service by the Ministry of Defence because of its unique capability as a kinetic penetrator against the most modern types of main battle tank armour.

The MOD's current assessment is that United Kingdom forces fired fewer than 100 DU tank rounds against Iraqi military forces during hostilities. DU ammunition was not directed against Iraqi civilians. The quantity of DU ammunition fired by United States forces during the Gulf War was considerably greater than that fired by United Kingdom forces.

Some Iraqi personnel, both military and civilian, may have been exposed to the combustion of DU ammunition during, or immediately following, the Gulf War. DU is pyrophoric material. When a DU projectile strikes a hard target (such as a heavily armoured main battle tank), the uranium burns to form various oxides.

The Ministry of Defence advised that there are two types of hazard posed by DU: a radiation hazard, although DU is a low specific activity material as defined by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and a chemical toxicity hazard, which is similar to that posed by other heavy metals, such as lead. DU has the potential to cause adverse health effects if ingested, inhaled (for example, from DU dust in the vicinity of a target, such as a tank which has been hit by the DU projectile), or absorbed (for example, from embedded DU shrapnel). The British Government has no information regarding any Iraqi casualties which may have resulted from exposure to DU or its combustion products.

Your second question asked why the Government encourages the flouting of international law against Iraqi civilians and is linked directly to your third question on resolution 986. We have no argument with the people of Iraq and I can assure you that the Government has every sympathy for them. There should be no doubt about where the responsibility for their suffering lies - with Saddam Hussein. Sanctions are aimed at the Iraqi regime and not at the people. Food and medicine have never been subject to sanctions, so the Government which has supported maintaining sanctions against Saddam Hussein cannot be accused of starving the population. To quit war on want the totalitarian and repressive policies of the regime currently in place in Iraq remain one of the main obstacles to the development of the Iraqi people, unfortunately, Saddam Hussein has always preferred to spend Iraq's money on himself. Since the Gulf War, he has numerous luxurious presidential palaces. He has continued to spend money on trying to import weapons of mass destruction to replace those found and destroyed by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Saddam Hussein had deliberately taken a cynical decision to allow the Iraqi people to starve in order to increase the pressure on the international community to give in and lift sanctions.

Since 1991 the United Kingdom has donated over £100 million in aid to Iraq, making us the second largest donor. We also co-sponsored the original Security Council resolution which set up the "Oil For Food" programme under which Iraq can sell oil to fund the purchase of humanitarian supplies despite wide separate reports to the contrary, a high proportion of the food and medicine supplies have been supplied and distributed to the Iraqi people. You may have noticed that the Council has also approved, again unanimously, another resolution to double the size of the "Oil For Food" Programme and so provide further immediate humanitarian relief to the Iraqi people. That resolution too was a British initiative.

A.N. King
Middle East Department
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